

Version:	1.0 Guidance for Understanding roles and responsibilities of Core groups
Approved by:	Operational and Procedures Subgroup. Chair: Theresa Leavy
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1.1 Introduction

- 1.1.1 When a conference decides that a child should be the subject of a child protection plan, a qualified and experienced LA children's social worker must be appointed as the key worker to co-ordinate all aspects of the inter-agency child protection plan.
- 1.1.2 The forum to undertake this co-ordinated multi-agency work is the core group, whose membership will have been identified at the child protection conference.

1.2 Core group

Responsibilities

- 1.2.1 The core group is responsible for the formulation and implementation of the detailed child protection plan, previously outlined at the conference. All members of the core group are jointly responsible for:
- Collecting information to assist the key worker in completing the core assessment;
 - Participating in the compilation of the core assessment;
 - The formulation and implementation of the detailed child protection plan, refining it as necessary;
 - Carrying out their part of the plan;
 - Monitoring progress against specified outcomes of the detailed child protection plan;
 - Making recommendations to subsequent review conferences about future protection plans and needs;
 - Attending core group meetings and ensuring there is no drift in planning and intervention.

Membership

- 1.2.2 Membership of the core group will have been identified at the child protection conference and must include:
- The key worker, who leads / chairs the core group;
 - The child if appropriate (see guidance on case conference);
 - Parents and relevant family members;
 - Professionals involved with the child and / or parent;
 - Foster carers or residential care staff who will have direct contact with the family.
- 1.2.3 Core groups are an important forum for working with parents, wider family members, and children of sufficient age and understanding. Where there are conflicts of interest between family members in the work of the core group, the child's best interests should always take precedence.

Timing

- 1.2.4 The date of the first core group meeting must be within ten working days of the initial child protection conference. After that the core group should meet every six weeks. More regular meetings may be required according to the needs of the child.
- 1.2.5 The first core group meeting date must be arranged at the end of the conference, along with the required frequency of subsequent meetings.
- 1.2.6 Dates for future meetings must be agreed at the first core group meeting following each conference. Where a meeting needs to be rescheduled, this must be confirmed in writing to all concerned by the key worker.

1.3 Formulation of child protection plan

Completion of core assessment

- 1.3.1 Completion of the core assessment, within 35 working days, should include an analysis of the risk of harm to the child; and the child's developmental needs and the parents' capacity to respond to those needs, including parents' capacity to ensure that the child is safe from harm. Decisions based on this analysis should be used to develop the child protection plan.

Purpose of child protection plan

- 1.3.2 The purpose of a child protection plan is to facilitate and make explicit a co-ordinated approach to:
- Ensure that each child in the household is safe and prevent them from suffering further harm;
 - Promote the child's health and development (i.e. welfare);
 - Provided it is in the best interests of the child, to support the family and wider family members to safeguard and promote the welfare of their child.
- 1.3.3 It must be clarified for parents:
- What the causes for concern are that have resulted in the decision that a child needs a child protection plan;
 - What needs to change;
 - What is expected of them as part of the plan for safeguarding the child.
- 1.3.4 Review of progress on achieving the outcomes set out in the child protection plan and consideration as to whether changes need to be made should be an agenda item at each review conference.
- 1.3.5 The child protection plan may be used as evidence, in any legal proceedings, of the efforts that have been made to work in partnership (this must be made clear to parents).

Detailed child protection plan - from the core group

- 1.3.6 The core group is responsible for drawing up in more detail the child protection plan for each child, covering the following areas in the context of the outline protection plan:

- Identification of what needs to change to reduce the risk of significant harm;
- A description of the identified needs of the child and what services are required;
- The frequency that the child will be seen (see [section 1.3.20. Seeing the child](#));
- Ethnic / cultural / religious considerations (e.g. necessity for an interpreter, avoidance of appointments with family on significant religious festivals);
- Issues arising from any disability;
- A consideration of the views of the child, insofar as this is consistent with the child's welfare;
- A consideration of the views of the parents, insofar as this is consistent with the child's welfare;
- Identification of parenting strengths;
- A clear identification of roles and responsibilities of professionals and family members;
- Identification of actions to promote the child's health and development;
- Identification of actions to support the family and wider family members in promoting the welfare of the child;
- A description of the nature and frequency of contact with the child and the roles and responsibilities of professionals, including specialist resources and adult services;
- Identification of what further core and specialist assessment is necessary to assist in judgements about safeguarding and promoting the welfare of the child;
- Identification of who (including family members) will be responsible for what actions, taking into consideration the wishes and feelings of the child;
- Establishment of specific short term and long term aims and objectives;
- Identification of timescales for the aims and objectives to be achieved;
- Identification of measurements for success (how will the family and professionals know there has been a change);
- Method of monitoring and evaluating progress, including identifying which professional is responsible for checking required changes;
- Consideration of a contingency plan if circumstances change quickly, or if insufficient change occurs.

Detailed child protection plan – written agreement

- 1.3.7 The key worker must make a record of the core group meetings and formulate the detailed child protection plan in the form of a written agreement for all parties to sign. The Luton Safeguarding Children Board should ensure that standard arrangements for the recording of the written agreement are in place.
- 1.3.8 The child protection plan / agreement should be based on the findings of the core assessment and follow the dimensions of the assessment framework.

- 1.3.9 The child protection plan / agreement should take into consideration the wishes and feelings of the child, and the views of the parents, insofar as they are consistent with the child's welfare. The key worker should make every effort to ensure that the child/ren and parents have a clear understanding of the planned outcomes, that they accept the plan and are willing to work to it.
- 1.3.10 The key worker should achieve this by, as far as possible, constructing the plan / agreement together with the child and the family. An interpreter should be used if the child or family's level of English means that they are not able to participate fully in these discussions unless they are conducted in their own language.

Agreeing the plan with the child

- 1.3.11 The completed child protection plan / agreement should be explained to the child in a manner which is in accordance with their age and understanding. The child should be given a copy of the plan written at a level appropriate to their age and understanding, and in their preferred language.

Agreeing the plan with parents

- 1.3.12 Staff should ensure that the parents understand:
- The evidence of risk of significant harm which resulted in the child becoming the subject of a child protection plan;
 - What needs to change;
 - What is expected of them as part of the plan for safeguarding and promoting the child's welfare.
- 1.3.13 The parents should receive a written copy of the plan so that they are clear about who is doing what when and the planned outcomes for the child.
- 1.3.14 If the parents' preferences have not been accepted in the plan / agreement about how best to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child, the reasons for this should be explained. Parents should be told about their right to complain and make representations, and how to do so.

Agreeing the plan with agencies

- 1.3.15 All parties should be clear about the respective roles and responsibilities of family members and different agencies in implementing the child protection plan / agreement.
- 1.3.16 Copies of the notes and the written agreement should be circulated to core group members within five working days of the core group meeting. The agreement, signed by the members of the core group, should be returned to the key worker within another five working days. Implementation of the child protection plan must begin immediately and not await formal signatures.
- 1.3.17 Any disagreements should have been discussed at the core group meeting, recorded with reasons and reflected appropriately in the written plan / agreement. It is permissible to rely on electronic signatures or emails confirming acceptance of an agency's responsibilities under the child protection plan, but all such signatures and emails must be collected in the child's LA children's social care record.
- 1.3.18 The child protection plan / agreement should also be on the adult service user's record if the parent is known to LA adult social care or health services.

- 1.3.19 All agencies are responsible for the implementation of the child protection plan and all professionals must ensure they are able to deliver their commitments or, if not possible, that these are re-negotiated.

Seeing the child

- 1.3.20 The core group must ensure the child/ren are seen at least every four weeks by the key worker and by other core group members as appropriate unless a different frequency is stipulated by the child protection conference. The interaction must be clearly recorded, analysis of the risk of harm to the child should be made and all the information should be shared with the key worker and the core group.

1.4 Key worker role

- 1.4.1 It is important that the role of the key worker is fully explained at the initial child protection conference and at the core group.
- 1.4.2 At every initial or pre-birth conference, where a child protection plan is put into place, the conference chair must name a qualified social worker, identified by the LA appropriate children's social care manager, to fulfil the role of key worker for the child.
- 1.4.3 The key worker should complete the core assessment of the child and family, securing contributions from core group members and others as necessary. They should co-ordinate the contribution of family members and other agencies to plan the actions which need to be taken, put the child protection plan into effect, and review progress against the planned outcomes set out in the plan. It is important that the role of the key worker is fully explained at the initial child protection conference and at the core group.
- 1.4.4 The key worker should also regularly ascertain the child's wishes and feelings, and keep the child up to date with the child protection plan and any developments or changes.
- 1.4.5 The key worker should:
- Convene and chair / lead core group meetings;
 - Provide a written record of meetings for all core group members and the appropriate LA children's social care manager;
 - Ensure that the outline child protection plan is developed, in conjunction with members of the core group, into a detailed multi-agency protection plan;
 - Clearly note and include in the written record any areas of disagreement;
 - Produce a written agreement from the protection plan to be signed by all members of the core group, copied to all signatories and maintained on the child's file;
 - Obtain a full understanding of the family's history, which must involve reading previous LA children's social care files as well as current records in use in LA children's social care, including those relating to other children who have been part of any households involving the current carers of the child. Additional information should be obtained from relevant other agencies and local authorities;

- Complete the core assessment of the child and family, securing contributions / information from core group members and any other agencies with relevant information;
- Co-ordinate the contribution of family members and all agencies in putting the plan into action and reviewing the objectives stated in the plan.

Seeing the child

1.4.6 The key worker should:

- See the child at home and alone for part of each visit, at least every four weeks or at intervals specified by the child protection conference plan;
- Ensure that the child's bedroom is seen at least once between each conference;
- Ensure they see the child alone (with parents' agreement) or babies awake at least every six weeks or at the intervals specified by the child protection conference plan (if parents refuse, the appropriate LA children's social care manager must be informed).

1.4.7 The frequency of contact with the child by the key worker or core group members detailed above is a minimum standard. In exceptional circumstances the core group may decide that the required contact level should be less frequent. Any such decision should be authorised by the appropriate LA children's social care manager.

Difficulties maintaining contact with the child

1.4.8 If the key worker or any other involved professional has difficulty obtaining direct access to the child, the appropriate LA children's social care manager should be informed, as well as other core group members. This must result in a plan of action agreed between core group members and the police.

1.4.9 In these circumstances, formal agreement must be reached that an appropriately qualified and experienced member of another core group agency carries out the direct contact, or that a review conference be called. Such a decision must be recorded and authorised by the appropriate LA children's social care manager, the police and the agency undertaking the direct contact.

Routine written records

1.4.10 The key worker must maintain a complete and up-to-date signed record on the child's current file, electronic or manual, to include:

- The time and date of every home visit, stating who was present, confirmation that the key worker spoke with the child (including if alone), or providing a clear reason why not;
- Any information gained or observations made during the visit relevant to the identified risk of harm to the child;
- Circumstances of all family members;
- Specific information about key subjects such as meals and sleeping arrangements (the key worker must observe the child's bedroom);

- Factual reports of the child's presentation and behaviour (describing what they did, said and how they looked, avoiding non-specific labels such as 'disturbed / acting out / unkempt, unhappy' etc.);
- Any new incidents or injuries, which must be subject to a full s47 enquiry;
- The date, time and content of any communication which relates to the child and family (distinguishing between fact and opinion).

Responsibility for convening conferences

- 1.4.11 The key worker is responsible, in liaison with the child protection chair and administrator, for convening the review child protection conference, the dates for which should have been set at the previous conference:
- No more than three months after the initial conference;
 - No more than six months after a review conference.
- 1.4.12 Dates for conferences should usually only be changed in exceptional circumstances and with the agreement of the conference chair. When dates are changed, they should be brought forward where possible and should not be held at timescales that exceed the above timescales. The key worker must ensure that the invitation list is updated for every conference so that the correct professionals are invited in good time. Updating the invitation list is not an administrative task.
- 1.4.13 Consideration should be given to bringing forward the date of a review conference in the following circumstances:
- Following a new and significant incident relating to concerns about child protection, usually involving a s47 enquiry;
 - When there is a significant change in the circumstances of the child or family;
 - When there are significant difficulties in carrying out the child protection plan.
- 1.4.14 The request to bring forward the date of a review conference should be made by a strategy meeting / discussion of a s47 enquiry or by the LA children's social worker, following consultation with the core group members and the conference Chair, and must be authorised by the appropriate LA children's social care manager.

Absence of the key worker

- 1.4.15 It is the joint responsibility of the key worker, and the appropriate LA children's social care manager, to ensure that clear cover arrangements are in place when the key worker is absent on annual leave, training etc.
- 1.4.16 Parents and children and other core group members must be informed of planned and unplanned absences of the key worker, who will be covering the role and what contacts will be made.

LA children's social care – first line manager role

- 1.4.17 The first line manager has a vital role in managing the progress of the case and supporting the key worker.
- 1.4.18 The manager should:

- Read and approve all assessments, reports to the conference, plans and decisions on the child's file, including the incident log;
- Chair the first core group and others where thought to be appropriate, such as in cases involving professional disagreement for instance;
- Discuss the progress of the protection plan and any concerns in supervision, including ensuring that there has been adequate direct contact with the child/ren;
- Record management decisions in supervision in the child's record to note agreed actions or decisions and approve the record;
- Agree conference reports and the child protection plan;
- Review the plan with the key worker when unexpected developments or crises occur and together make a decision whether to recommend that a review child protection conference date be brought forward;
- Attend all conferences wherever possible;
- Arrange cover for the key worker in case of sickness and ensure arrangements are in place when the key worker is on annual leave and training, including the checking, and any necessary action resulting from, post, e-mails and telephone contacts.

1.5 Difficulties in implementing the child protection plan

- 1.5.1 Where any member of the core group is aware of difficulties implementing the protection plan due to changed or unforeseen circumstances, the key worker must be informed immediately and a core group meeting / discussion co-ordinated to agree a reconsidered child protection plan.
- 1.5.2 Circumstances about which the key worker should be informed include inability to gain access to a child who is subject to a child protection plan, for whatever reasons, on two consecutive home visits (the second visit being a second attempt to see the child in close succession of the first attempt). In any such circumstances, action must be agreed between the concerned agency, LA children's social care and the police.
- 1.5.3 If the difficulty in implementing the protection plan impacts on the safety of the child, managers and advisers (appropriate social care manager, police, designated / named doctor / nurse, teacher) must be consulted and consideration be given to the need for immediate legal action, emergency police action to gain access to a premises where appropriate, a s47 enquiry and/or to bring forward the date of the review child protection conference.
- 1.5.4 If members are concerned that there are difficulties implementing the protection plan arising from disagreement amongst professional agencies or a core group member not carrying out agreed responsibilities this must be addressed by:
- First, discussion with core group members;
 - Second, if required, involvement of respective managers / child protection advisers;
 - If the situation remains unresolved follow conflict resolution policy.

- 1.5.5 In these situations it is likely to be helpful for a manager from the council's children's services or a specialist child protection officer to chair the core group meeting.

1.6 Interventions and services

- 1.6.1 Decisions about how to intervene, including what services to offer, should be based on evidence about what is likely to work best to bring about good outcomes for the child. A number of aspects of intervention should be considered in the context of the child protection plan, in the light of evidence from assessment of the child's developmental needs, the parents' capacity to respond appropriately to the child's needs, and the wider family circumstances.
- 1.6.2 It is important that services are provided to give the child and family the best chance of achieving the required changes. If a child cannot be cared for safely by their parent/s, they will have to be placed elsewhere whilst work is being undertaken with the child and family. Irrespective of where the child is living, interventions should specifically address:
- The short and long-term developmental needs of the child;
 - The child's understanding of what has happened to them;
 - The abusing and non-abusing parent-child relationship and individual parent's capacity to respond to the child's needs;
 - The parent/s relationship with other adults, including the other parent if there is one;
 - If there are two parents, their ability to jointly parent the child;
 - Other family relationships;
 - Possible changes to the family's social and environmental circumstances.
- 1.6.3 Intervention may have a number of inter-related components:
- Action to make a child safe;
 - Action to help promote a child's short and longer term health and development (i.e. his / her welfare);
 - Action to help parent/s in safeguarding a child and promoting their welfare;
 - Support and therapy for an abused child;
 - Support or therapy for a perpetrator of abuse.
- 1.6.4 The development of secure parent-child attachments is critical to a child's healthy development. The quality and nature of the attachment will be a key issue to be considered in decision making, especially if decisions are being made about moving a child from one setting to another; re-uniting a child with their birth family; or considering a permanent placement away from the child's family.
- 1.6.5 If the plan is to assess whether the child can be reunited with the caregiver/s responsible for the maltreatment, very detailed work will be required to help the caregiver/s develop the necessary parenting skills.
- 1.6.6 A key issue in deciding on suitable interventions will be whether the child's developmental needs can be responded to within their family context, and within

- timescales that are appropriate for the child. These timescales may not be compatible with those for the caregiver/s who is / are in receipt of therapeutic help.
- 1.6.7 The process of decision making and planning should be as open as possible, from an ethical as well as practical point of view.
 - 1.6.8 New information may change the assessment of risk of harm, either positively or negatively, and may require urgent decisions to protect the child. Similarly, where the family situation is not improving or changing fast enough to respond to the child's needs, decisions will be necessary about the long-term future of the child. In the longer term it may mean it will be in the best interests of the child to be placed in an alternative family context.
 - 1.6.9 Key to these considerations is what is in the child's best interests, informed by the child's wishes and feelings.
 - 1.6.10 Children who have suffered significant harm may continue to experience the consequences of this abuse irrespective of where they are living: whether remaining with or being reunited with their families or alternatively being placed in new families. This relates particularly to their behavioural and emotional development.
 - 1.6.11 Therapeutic work with the child should continue, therefore, irrespective of where the child is placed, in order to ensure the needs of the child are responded to appropriately.
 - 1.6.12 More information to assist with making decisions about interventions is available in the chapter 4 of the [*Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families \(Department of Health, 2000\)*](#) and accompanying practice guidance.